

## Budget Hearing Testimony

March 3, 2015

Testimony regarding the Governor's proposed elimination of the Parent Trust Fund

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriation Committee:

My name is Jane Lehman. I am a West Hartford resident and a graduate of the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) Class of 2012. I am here before you today to encourage you to maintain funding for the Parent Trust Fund in the State Department of Education budget.

PLTI is funded by the Parent Trust Fund in conjunction with the William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund. The Fund contributes matching dollars to the state budget appropriation. You received a letter from the Fund detailing the many ways the Fund matches State investments. I urge you not to leave those dollars on the table – that would be a true disservice to the Children of Connecticut.

PLTI is a 20 week course that teaches democracy skills to parents so they can be more effective advocates for their children. The goal is for successive classes to create a pyramid effect of community caring and to develop a coalition of parent leaders. It focuses on training parents in leadership skills so they can improve health, safety and learning outcomes for children.

I was a member of the inaugural PLTI class in West Hartford in 2012. With 20 other people, I spent every Thursday evening tackling a curriculum that covered such diverse topics as: Creating a Caring Community for Children, Parents as Change Agents, How to Define a Problem and Work Toward a Solution, Using Your Voice, How State Governments Work and Budgets – From Wallets to State – It's all Money and Priorities.

In addition to addressing these and other topics, each participant must create and execute a Community Project after identifying Project Goals and creating an Action Plan. Some of the projects from my class alone included: Literacy Learning; Books for Africa and America – Using schools to collect books to send to South African schools without libraries, Bikes for Kids – a program at Charter Oak School to collect and redistribute bikes and new helmets for kids, Welcoming a refugee family to West Hartford and providing support for them, Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation – a food distribution program for summer vacation, a math enrichment program, an oral history project, a Thank You Veterans project, a project to put STEM education in preschool, and opening a new Early Learning playgroup in another elementary school in town.

Copies of the PLTI itinerary from 2012 and a complete list of our 20 class projects are attached for your review.

The PLTI program has been running for 23 years. It is offered in 15 Connecticut towns. I urge you to take a moment to review the list of projects from my class, and then consider that this was only one of 15 classes for that year. Accumulating 23 years worth of Community Projects would paint the full, detailed picture of how important PLTI is to communities across the state. Once you review the lists submitted to you by other PLTI graduates as well, you will understand what a vibrant program it truly is.

Since taking the class, I have become a Board Member of The Bridge, an advocate for gun safety legislation, an active participant in the political process, and Co-Chair of "Great by 8" – an early childhood collaborative seeking to ensure that all children in West Hartford are socially and emotionally healthy, and eager and ready to learn by age 8. There are other PLTI on that board investing time and energy to get us toward our mission. Great by 8 is in the process of exploring a merger with another town collaborative, "Growing Great Schools" which was started by another PLTI graduate.

Like PLTI, Great by 8 is also funded in part by the Graustein Memorial Fund. It is a combined Discovery Community Board and the School Readiness Council for West Hartford. Discovery Communities establish a collaborative structure for inclusive local decision making in which parents engage as full partners in developing a local early childhood plan to ensure school success for every child.

In closing, I will also mention that becoming a parent advocate has had a tangible effect on my own daughter who is still in high school. She is a member of the Humanitarian Club at Hall High School. She and her fellow club members, with some excellent adult guidance, have been a persistent, and reasonable voice for ending the misuse of Native American names and caricatures as school mascots.

PLTI gives much more back to the state than it ever takes – especially when you consider that the \$500,00 in state appropriation generates \$625,000 in matching funds at the state and local level.

Thank you,

Jane Lehman

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## PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE CURRICULUM

*Helping parents who care, become parents who lead*

### **Retreat: Creating a Caring Community for Children**

Issues affecting children. Milestones in child and family development.

**GOAL:** Development of a parent group, begin understanding of when and how a community cares for children.

### **Class 1: Thriving with Diversity in the Group Process**

What do we look like now? What will Americans look like in the future?  
What are the strengths of separateness and integration?

**GOAL:** To acquire knowledge regarding diversity, ethnic, class and race differences.

### **Class 2: The Change Process**

A look at change within our own experience. The tools we can use to change the environment.

**GOAL:** To understand what creates change within self, family and community.

### **Class 3: Parents as Change Agents:**

How do our own experiences in family life influence our notion of the right to be a parent leader? What is our own self-image?

**GOAL:** To help parents perceive themselves as change agents and to understand obstacles to leadership.

### **Class 4: How to Define a Problem and Work Toward a Solution**

A look at community needs from the parent perspective.

**GOAL:** To begin working through problems with developed strategy and conflict resolution skills.



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- Class 5: The Intentional Use of Language**  
What are forms of communication and why do they matter? Active Listening and constructive ways to make a point.
- GOAL: To understand the importance of using language to create a framework and express viewpoints.
- Class 6: Learning How a Community Works**  
How to use and maximize community resources. Who has the resource information?  
How do community meetings work?
- GOAL: To begin mapping communities with increased understanding of assets, resources and communication flow.
- Class 7: How Local Systems Work and How to Interact With Them**  
Who makes the decisions in the city, in the schools, at the library?  
How do policies develop?
- GOAL: To increase awareness of the structure of local institutions and systems through attention to budget, policy and communication.
- Class 8: Networks**  
How to think about who should become part of the change effort. How to expand your partners.
- GOAL: To further access goals for children and enable partners to reach goals.
- Class 9: The Power of the Media and How to Use it**  
How to use social media and traditional media. Parents as messengers for children.
- GOAL: To increase understanding of all forms of media, how they work and how to access them.



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### **Class 10: Using Your Voice**

How to speak publicly. How to present public statements with success.

GOAL: To bolster confidence, self awareness and the impact of self presentation.

### **Class 11: The Life Cycle of the Child and the Functions of the Family**

How does the life cycle of the child intersect with the life cycle of the family and family functions?

GOAL: A beginning understanding of family function, family structure and child development.

### **Class 12: Social and Economic Trends Affecting Children and Families**

How to understand the demographic, economic and social trends. What are the assets and needs of children and families in our region?

GOAL: An understanding of social, economic and demographic factors impacting child health, learning, safety and care-giving.

### **Class 13: What is Public Policy?**

A look at the role of government in democracy, the meaning of policy, types of policy and how policy happens.

GOAL: An understanding of public policy as a vehicle for democracy, citizen input and change for children.



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### **Class 14: How the State Works**

A look at state government – structure, communications, resources, policy impact and governance.

GOAL: An understanding of how government can be utilized by citizens to effect dialogue and change for the public good.

### **Class 15: How a City Works**

A look at town and city structures, policies and resources.

GOAL: An understanding of how parents can interface with elected officials, city departments and school boards to communicate and effect change for children.

### **Class 16: How do we Understand the Law**

An overview of children's law to assess the impact of state and federal code in protecting and enhancing the lives of children.

GOAL: Demystification of law, with increased comfort reading children's law.

### **Class 17: Budgets – From Wallets to State – It's all Money and Priorities**

An introduction to budget design and analysis within state, city and schools.

GOAL: Increased comfort level with fiscal analysis of children's policy and programs.



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- Class 18:**      **Evaluation, Outcomes and Accountability**  
An overview of goals in policy and program to improve outcomes and public accountability. What is an outcome measure, a benchmark, a result?
- GOAL: A beginning understanding of benchmarks and longitudinal tools.
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- Class 19:**      **The Magic of the Unexpected: Forming New Alliances**  
Forging new alliances and expanding partnerships to create broad impact for children.
- GOAL: An increased understanding of the dynamics of policy change, coalition-building and social climate.
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- Class 20:**      **Language: Packaging and Moving Agendas**  
How to design initiatives: how to clarify goal, purpose, outcomes with vigor, art and impact.
- GOAL: Improved understanding of media and language and its impact; and the connection between language and clarity of goal and constituency.

## **West Hartford PLTI Graduates and Community Projects**

**PLTI Coordinator – Tammy Exum**

**Community Sponsor – The Bridge Family Center**

**Parent Leader Address – Mary Fay**

**Olga Ayala-Meyers** -“Free Early Childhood Learning in All Schools”

**Erica Bloch** -“Books for Africa and America” - Linking schools to collect books for South African schools without libraries

**Chris Brewer** -“Five Ways to Tackle a Bully” - Skills parents can reinforce at home

**Douglas Chritton** -“STEM Enrichment in the Primary Grades” – Science, technology, engineering and math in the elementary school

**Grisel Colon** -“A Place to Turn” - A social services pamphlet for the homeless

**Laury Currier** -“Charter Oak’s 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Bike Rodeo” - 50 bikes and 25 new helmets for “Bikes for Kids”

**Deanna Deshpande** -“Welcoming a Refugee Family to West Hartford” - Co-sponsoring and providing a year of support

**Mary Fay** -“Bless Our Little Bloomers” - Garden at The Kid’s Place Preschool

**Nydia Figueroa** -“From Incarceration to Rehabilitation” - Re-entry Family Supports

**Janet Fournier** -“We Thank You!” - A Tribute to Veterans

**Keith Griffin** -“Hug the FRC!” - Fundraiser for the Family Resource Center at Charter Oak at Celebrate West Hartford

**Emily Hofstatter**- “Board of Education Insight” - A brochure to help parents become involved in the BOE process



**Erwin Hurst, Sr.**- “One Million Exams” - A campaign to get one million women of color annual mammograms

**Jane Lehman** -“Early Learning Playgroup at Webster Hill Elementary School” - for children birth to age four

**Kelly Murphy**- “Hunger Doesn’t Go on Vacation” - A summer lunch program at Whiting Lane School

**Lisa Renfro** -“STEM Education in Preschool/Pre-K” - Hands-on unit to preschoolers on science, technology, engineering and math

**Karen Scheinerman** -“The Most Important Job You Will Never Get Paid For” - Parent Engagement for Birth to Three Program

**MaryBeth Serdechny** -“Pick Your Battles” - Improving the school climate in the West Hartford public schools

**Audrey Sobel** -“Oral History Project” - Middle school students and elderly residents at the Hebrew Home write biographies together

**Elaine Walker**- “Clean Cut” - Free haircutting clinics for the children experiencing financial hardships

**Demetria Wright**- “Back to Basics” - A math enrichment and tutorial program